An athletic after-school activity that reignites elementary school rivalries, the CYO basketball league has become immensely popular among Charlotte Catholic students.

The league is open to all, and includes players of all shapes and sizes. Athleticism is not a requirement, nor is knowledge of the game; all players need is a jersey and a big heart. Passion and intensity are more important than the ability to drain a three-pointer or dribble between the legs, and many players let their emotions run wild during the season.

“Sometimes the games get so intense I need to take a few seconds to calm myself,” said junior power forward Nick Russo.

Besides heart and passion, another vital part of the successful church league team is style. In a league where most players spend more time polishing their high-tops than their jump shots, appearance often outweighs performance. Headbands, arm sleeves, and flashy shoes are the tools of a church league champion.

“Style and swag are key components to success in church league basketball. How can you win a game if you don’t look better than your opponent?” said Russo.

There are few elite players in the league, with the skill level of most falling somewhere in between mediocre and incompetent. This lack of talent makes the final scores of regular season games irrelevant, and the main goal of most teams is to have a good time, until the playoffs begin.

Despite the laid-back atmosphere of the regular season, the postseason is intense and can be intimidating for inexperienced players. Playing a season without winning the championship is like conquering a dragon but not marrying the princess, or like eating an Oreo without milk; it is pointless, and every veteran player understands the importance of the situation.

The end of the season is a sad time for church league players. Some move on to play travel basketball, while the less athletically gifted return to their couches and video games. Gyms are abandoned, basketballs lose their bounce, and the sun shines less brightly.

Season’s end is difficult for players who grow so attached to the game of basketball and to their teammates. Some students have a hard time adjusting to life without their beloved church league.

“Once you play CYO basketball, it’s hard to stop. It’s a life changing experience like no other,” said junior forward Drew Nantais.